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Implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2409 (2018), in which the Council requested me to report on the implementation of the commitments made under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.[1] It provides an overview of peace and security developments in the Great Lakes region since the issuance of my previous report (S/2018/209) and covers the period from 1 March to 31 August 2018.

II. Major developments

A. Security situation

2. During the reporting period, the security situation in the Great Lakes region was marked by unresolved conflicts in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan; persistent activities by illegal armed groups in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and reports of security-related incidents in some border areas. The presence and activities of foreign armed groups in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo remained a major challenge to security and continued to affect the building of trust and cooperation among countries of the region.

3. A positive development during the period was cooperation among the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda towards the repatriation of disarmed combatants of the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and their dependants, as well as former combatants of the Mouvement du 23 mars

[1] In this context, the region includes the 13 signatories to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, namely, Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, the Sudan, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. In addition, the following four intergovernmental organizations act as witnesses/guarantors of the Framework: the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Southern African Development Community and the United Nations.

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(M23), following the launch of the follow-up mechanism for their repatriation, in April 2018.

4. There was also progress in the relocation of elements of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO) accommodated on premises of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As of August 2018, 576 SPLM/A-IO elements, out of an initial total of 627, had relocated to third countries as a result of joint efforts by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and MONUSCO.

5. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the security situation continued to deteriorate in the eastern provinces. Some local armed groups, including the Mouvement national pour le renouveau, operating in North Kivu, and the Coalition nationale du peuple pour la souveraineté du Congo, led by Mayi-Mayi Yakutumba, operating in parts of South Kivu, Maniema and Tanganyika Provinces, strengthened their anti-government postures.

6. While no military confrontation involving the former M23 members was recorded during the reporting period, in a communiqué issued on 13 August, the group declared that its elements had been present on Congolese territory since January 2018. The communiqué stated that the group did not intend to engage in war and, instead, meant to promote a free and credible electoral process in the country.

7. The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) remained active in North Kivu Province and reportedly continued to recruit followers from neighbouring countries. Recent operations by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo against the group reportedly resulted in a split within ADF, which, thereafter, appeared to be operating in small, largely independent groups. Alleged ADF attacks targeted Congolese security forces and the civilian population, as well as MONUSCO forces. Since the beginning of 2018, more than 100 civilians have been killed in ADF attacks. The most severe incident during the reporting period was the killing of 14 farmers on 2 August, on the outskirts of Beni, North Kivu Province.

8. The reporting period witnessed continuing weakening of FDLR, due to reported internal divisions as well as some progress towards the repatriation of disarmed former FDLR combatants and dependants to Rwanda. This notwithstanding, FDLR remained active and allegedly recruited from within the Hutu-dominated Nyatura armed groups and in Virunga National Park, in North Kivu Province. Furthermore, FDLR reportedly provided logistical support to local armed groups, particularly Nyatura.

9. The security situation in Burundi remained calm yet unpredictable. On 11 and 12 May, unidentified armed elements staged an attack on a village in Cibitoke, near the border between Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, killing at least 26 civilians. Burundian authorities claimed that the attack had been carried out by Burundian armed groups operating from the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and requested the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region to investigate the incident.

10. Cross-border security-related incidents continued along the border between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda, on the one hand, and between Burundi and Rwanda, on the other. On 5 July 2018, four Ugandan soldiers and three civilians were killed in clashes between the security forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda on Lake Edward. Congolese authorities requested the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism to investigate the incident, which, they claimed, had been triggered when Ugandan troops had entered Congolese territory. During the same period, Uganda expressed concern regarding the presence, near its

border, of armed elements believed to belong to the Front de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri militia.

11. Following unconfirmed reports of activities by armed groups in Rwandan territory near the border with Burundi, the Burundian armed forces released a statement on 10 July, noting that they had not found any evidence of Rwandan opposition groups operating from Burundian territory.

12. The continued presence of South Sudanese refugees and internally displaced persons along the Congolese border with South Sudan continued to present a security challenge as members of the warring South Sudanese factions were reported to mingle with the refugee population. A similar context prevailed along the border between the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where elements of Central African armed groups allegedly entered the Democratic Republic of the Congo in recent months.

13. In the Central African Republic, armed groups continued to occupy parts of the territory. Particularly in the east, militias maintained control of several areas of economic significance and continued to carry out deadly attacks, including against forces of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA).

B. Political developments

14. Some countries in the region, notably Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, continued to face political uncertainty and instability despite ongoing political and dialogue processes.

15. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, despite steady progress in the implementation of the electoral calendar, tensions persisted over the implementation of the political agreement of 31 December 2016 and modalities for conducting the elections scheduled for 23 December 2018. The decision by the President, Joseph Kabila, to respect the constitutional two-term limit and not seek a third term was welcomed by the opposition as well as regional and international partners, and contributed to the lowering of tensions.

16. The period for the registration of candidates for the presidential election ended on 8 August. Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary was designated as a candidate by the Front commun pour le Congo, led by President Kabila. On 25 August, six candidates who had registered for the presidential election were declared ineligible by the Independent National Electoral Commission, including Jean-Pierre Bemba, who had returned to Kinshasa on 1 August, following his acquittal on 7 June by the Appeals Chamber of the International Criminal Court of convictions for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Moïse Katumbi, former Governor of the former province of Katanga and leader of the platform Ensemble pour le changement, who had been in exile in Belgium, was unable to register as a candidate.

17. With regard to opening up political space in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, government officials maintained that the confidence-building measures envisaged in the 31 December 2016 political agreement had been implemented, including the release, in July, of several political prisoners. According to the Government, opposition and civil society figures who remained in detention were undergoing judicial proceedings on charges related to criminal activities. For their part, opposition groups alleged that the continuing detention of political figures was in breach of the 31 December 2016 agreement. While some political opposition groups were authorized to hold public gatherings, the ban on demonstrations and

political assemblies was not formally lifted, and activities by political parties, civil society organisations and journalists remained restricted.

18. In addition, opposition parties continued to raise concerns about the planned use of voting machines, as well as irregularities in the voter registry, which had been highlighted in an audit conducted by the International Organization of la Francophonie. The opposition demanded that the National Independent Electoral Commission address those concerns to enhance confidence in the voting process.

19. Regional and international diplomatic efforts to improve the political situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo continued during the reporting period, pursuant to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

20. On 24 April, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) held its Double Troika Summit in Luanda. President Kabila attended the Summit, at which Congolese political actors were urged to stay committed to the implementation of the electoral calendar and support for the electoral process and the strengthening of peace, security and political stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo were reaffirmed.

21. The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was discussed by the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, during the visits to Paris by the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, on 23 May and by the President of Angola, João Lourenço, on 28 May. On 2 August, President Kabila met with President Lourenço in Luanda. The two leaders underscored the good relations between their States, noted progress in implementing the electoral calendar and reaffirmed the centrality of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework in promoting peace in the region.

22. On 10 August, the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, visited Kinshasa. In a communiqué released after his meeting with President Kabila, the two leaders took note of progress in the electoral process.

23. On 14 August, President Lourenço hosted a summit of regional leaders to discuss, among other things, developments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan. The event was attended by the President of Gabon, Ali Bongo Ondimba, and the President of the Congo, Denis Sassou Nguesso, as well as representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and the African Union Commission. Discussion on the Democratic Republic of the Congo built on two tripartite meetings among President Sassou Nguesso, President Lourenço and President Kabila in late 2017 and early 2018, respectively. In their final communiqué, the leaders reaffirmed their readiness to support the Congolese people. They expressed concern over continued activities by negative forces, including ADF and FDLR, in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and called for regional action against those armed groups.

24. At the thirty-eighth ordinary summit of SADC, held in Windhoek on 17 and 18 August, the leaders praised President Joseph Kabila for not seeking re-election and noted that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo would continue to provide funding and logistics to enable the conduct of peaceful and credible elections.

25. In Burundi, tensions between the Government and the opposition persisted. Constitutional changes that had been endorsed by referendum on 17 May were rejected by opposition parties, on the grounds that the referendum had been inherently flawed and the changes adopted undermined the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi (2000). Burundian opposition groups have long complained of a lack of political space, and the circumstances surrounding the adoption of the new Constitution did little to defuse political tensions. The announcement on 7 June

by the President, Pierre Nkurunziza, that he would not seek re-election in 2020 was welcomed in the region and internationally.

26. Meanwhile, efforts by the region and the international community through the inter-Burundian dialogue, led by the East African Community, achieved limited progress in promoting inclusive political dialogue. In August, the Government of Burundi confirmed its planned participation in the fifth session of the dialogue, scheduled for October 2018.

27. Renewed and enhanced efforts by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) resulted in significant progress in the peace process in South Sudan. Talks between the negotiating parties were facilitated by the Sudan, with support from Uganda, and built on previous efforts led by Ethiopia. After the signing on 27 June of a permanent ceasefire, followed on 5 August by an agreement on the formation of a transitional government of national unity, to be led by the President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir, with SPLM/A-IO leader Riek Machar as his First Vice-President, the parties initialled a draft revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan on 30 August. The opposition, however, raised reservations, including regarding the number of states, the demarcation of tribal and state boundaries and the quorum for meetings of Parliament and the Council of Ministers. They requested the Heads of State and Government of IGAD to help resolve outstanding issues.

28. In the Central African Republic, the Government continued to make progress towards the restoration of State authority, although challenged by insecurity caused by the continuing activities of armed groups. The panel of facilitators of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation concluded its second round of consultations with the 14 recognized armed groups in April. Despite the efforts of the African Union-led panel, supported by the United Nations, the Economic Community of Central African States and other regional partners, this engagement has yet to translate into measurable reduction in violence in the country.

C. Humanitarian situation

29. Political tensions and conflict in Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan remained key drivers of humanitarian crises and needs in the Great Lakes region. Approximately 7.3 million people are currently uprooted in the region, of whom some 4.7 million are internally displaced and nearly 2.6 million are refugees and asylum seekers. Forced displacement is a key source and consequence of instability and mistrust in the region, particularly in cases of protracted displacement, in which refugees are often perceived by armed militias as being prime subjects for recruitment.

30. Since the beginning of 2018, some 90,000 new Congolese refugees have arrived in Uganda, with growing numbers in the United Republic of Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi. There are currently more than 780,000 Congolese refugees and asylum seekers in the Great Lakes region.

31. A total of 388,400 Burundian refugees are hosted in the United Republic of Tanzania (237,716), Rwanda (68,417), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (46,500) and Uganda (40,765). An estimated 178,000 Burundians are internally displaced. The return process that commenced following the resumption of the tripartite agreement among Burundi, the United Republic of Tanzania and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in September 2017 is expected to continue. During the reporting period, there was growing pressure to close the refugee camps along the border between Burundi and the United Republic of Tanzania, and for all Burundian refugees to return home before the end of 2019.

This raised a serious protection concern regarding those refugees who may be forced to return as the deadline approaches.

32. Some 10.9 million people were categorized as severely food-insecure across the Great Lakes region during the reporting period. The region also battled outbreaks of communicable diseases, including Ebola and cholera.

33. Despite rising needs, humanitarian responses in the Great Lakes region remained underfunded. As of August, funding levels for humanitarian response plans for countries in the region were as follows: Burundi, 26 per cent; the Central African Republic, 29 per cent; the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 24 per cent; and South Sudan, 44 per cent. In addition, the Regional Refugee Response Plans for Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan remained underfunded.

D. Human rights

34. Human rights trends in the Great Lakes region were marked by continuing violations of and restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms, in a context of shrinking political space, as well as by the growing vulnerability of some groups, notably internally displaced persons and refugees.

35. In countries affected by conflict and instability, as highlighted at the thirty-eighth session of the Human Rights Council, held from 18 June to 6 July, attacks on civilian populations by both armed groups and State security forces continued. While the region registered progress in the implementation of its commitments to fighting impunity and strengthening the rule of law through the operationalization of the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network, accountability for serious human rights violations and respect for the rule of law remained weak. Attacks against international actors, including the United Nations, also continued.

36. In both Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, limited progress was recorded in the release of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. In Burundi, opposition and civil society groups, as well as human rights advocates, frequently complained during the reporting period that some of those jailed in the context of the protests of 2015 remained in prison, even after having served their sentences or having received a presidential pardon. Both domestic and international media organizations were closely monitored by the Burundian authorities and censored or suspended if deemed unfavourable to the Government, especially in the run-up to the constitutional referendum held in May. Moreover, restricted access was granted to United Nations human rights mechanisms, notably the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi and the group of independent experts, whose members had their visas withdrawn in April 2018, shortly after arriving in the country.

37. In its update to the Human Rights Council on 27 June 2018, the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi reported continued human rights violations in the country, including extrajudicial killings, abductions and enforced disappearances, many of which were attributed to the armed youth wing of the ruling party, known as Imbonerakure. On 5 September, the Commission of Inquiry highlighted in its report that crimes against humanity had been committed in the country in 2017 and 2018. The Government of Burundi severely criticized the report as misleading.

38. In South Sudan, in a report released in July, United Nations investigators confirmed that between 16 April and 24 May, at least 232 civilians had been killed, and many more injured, in attacks by government and allied forces. They recommended expediting the establishment of the Hybrid Court for South Sudan to ensure accountability.

39. In the Central African Republic, regulations providing for the prosecution by the Special Criminal Court of serious crimes committed since 2003, including outside the Central African Republic, were adopted by Parliament in May 2018 and validated by the Constitutional Court.

III. Implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework

40. My Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region continued to engage the leaders of the region, the guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and other regional and international partners to advance the implementation of national, regional and international commitments under the Framework as well as the decisions adopted at the eighth high-level meeting of its Regional Oversight Mechanism.

A. Commitments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

41. My third quarterly report of 2018 on MONUSCO pursuant to resolution 2409 (2018) (S/2018/655) contains further information on the implementation of the national commitments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

B. Commitments of the region

42. The reporting period saw good progress in the implementation of regional commitments pertaining to enhanced cooperation on security, political and economic matters, as well as the fight against impunity through judicial cooperation.

43. Progress related to the commitment to addressing the security concerns of Member States was achieved through the repatriation of former FDLR combatants and their dependants, as well as former M23 members, in the context of the follow-up mechanism established for that purpose.

44. The United Nations remained engaged with SADC, pursuant to the decision made at the eighth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism related to the strengthening of the Intervention Brigade of MONUSCO. In that context, a joint task force of the United Nations and SADC conducted an assessment in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 28 April to 4 May to identify and address requirements to enhance the effectiveness of the Brigade.

45. In May, representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda met in Kasese, Uganda, to review the security situation in the border area. In a separate development, the Joint Permanent Commission of the two countries met from 21 to 23 August to discuss security, political and economic cooperation between them. Rwanda hosted a tripartite meeting of the Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration, with the participation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda, which resulted in joint recommendations to enhance community conservation and law enforcement in the area.

46. Regional leaders and organizations pursued efforts to address instability in the region, notably by promoting a peaceful political transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and advocating a peaceful resolution of the political crisis in Burundi.

47. In that context, the Regional Interministerial Committee, comprising the ministers for foreign affairs of the States members of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, met in Brazzaville on 21 July. Participants discussed the

situations in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan, and called upon the Troika of the Conference to undertake diplomatic efforts aimed at normalizing relations between Burundi and Rwanda.

48. On 7 June, on the occasion of the eighth African Border Day, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda physically marked their boundary adjacent to Rubavu, Rwanda, and Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo, as part of the demarcation efforts conducted under the African Union Border Programme.

49. Progress was also achieved in operationalizing the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network, established in 2016 as a testament to the commitment by the countries of the region to combating impunity, in line with the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and the 2006 Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region. During the reporting period, designated senior public prosecutors began to address cases involving cross-border crimes that require enhanced regional judicial cooperation.

50. On 26 June, Kenya hosted the fourteenth summit on the northern corridor integration projects, attended by Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda. Participating leaders reaffirmed their commitment to advancing regional integration and underscored the importance of accelerating socioeconomic transformation, industrialization and employment creation. The summit also saw the adoption of the Accession Treaty to the Mutual Defence Pact.

C. Commitments of the international community

51. The international community maintained a strong focus on the situation in the Great Lakes region, notably through the activities of special envoys and special representatives for the region and those of the International Contact Group on the Great Lakes region, as well as through bilateral engagements.

52. International partners continued to support the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, including through cross-border interventions intended to address the root causes of instability in the region, in the context of the Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework. However, funding for the Regional Strategic Framework remained low. Out of the estimated $100 million required for the five target countries, only $3.9 million has been received so far. That amount comprises $2 million from the Peacebuilding Fund and $1.9 million from the European Union. My Special Envoy remained in contact with the European Union to discuss additional funding. He also continued to collaborate with relevant United Nations resident coordinators and regional directors of agencies, funds and programmes to reinforce joint fundraising and cross-border project implementation.

IV. Implementation of the road map of my Special Envoy

53. My Special Envoy continued his good offices to support the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. To that end, he engaged with a broad range of actors, including national leaders, government officials, parliamentarians and representatives of political parties, women's groups, civil society organizations and regional organizations.

54. Throughout those engagements, my Special Envoy reaffirmed the United Nations commitment to advancing peace and security in the region and advocated credible, inclusive and peaceful elections and dialogue processes, as well as sustainable political solutions. He also underlined the need to make progress in neutralizing negative forces and repatriating former combatants, as well as addressing

the illicit exploitation of and trade in natural resources and their linkages to the activities of armed groups.

55. In addition, my Special Envoy urged the leaders in the region to identify and provide durable solutions for displaced populations and to ensure that impunity is addressed, so that perpetrators of serious crimes are promptly brought to justice. He also advocated greater participation by women in peace and political processes and for the needs of women and girls to be considered during the repatriation of former combatants and their dependants.

A. Good offices of my Special Envoy

Promoting cooperation and confidence-building in the region

56. Recognizing the importance of regional leadership and ownership of the peace and security agenda in the region, my Special Envoy continued to support the efforts of President Sassou Nguesso of the Congo, in his capacity as Chair of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Regional Oversight Mechanism, as well as those of President Lourenço of Angola, in his capacity as Chair of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security. He also worked closely with the African Union and the executive secretariat of the Conference to tackle peace and security challenges in the region and strengthen cooperation with those entities.

57. Further to the outcome of the high-level workshop convened by the Office of my Special Envoy and the African Union Commission to mark the fifth anniversary of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, held in Addis Ababa on 26 and 27 February 2018, my Special Envoy encouraged frank dialogue between leaders to resolve their differences and address any issue that could jeopardize good relations and weaken the bonds of friendship and solidarity between neighbours. During meetings with President Sassou Nguesso held in Brazzaville on 29 March and 20 July, my Special Envoy encouraged the President to take initiatives to build trust and deepen cooperation between countries affected by the activities of negative forces. The need for such initiatives was also discussed at the fifth ministerial meeting of the guarantors of the Framework, held in Brazzaville on 20 July.

58. Furthermore, as part of the preparations for the ninth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, scheduled to be held in Uganda on 8 October 2018, my Special Envoy met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uganda, Samuel Kutesa, in Kampala on 2 August. The two agreed that the Mechanism should seize the opportunity of this meeting to discuss ways to resolve differences and build trust and cooperation among its members.

Negative forces

59. In all his engagements, including at the fifth ministerial meeting of the guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, my Special Envoy expressed concern about the persistent activities of negative forces in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and advocated renewed regional collaboration to tackle instability and insecurity in the region.

60. Pursuant to the decision made at the eighth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, my Special Envoy and the African Union Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region, in close cooperation with MONUSCO, launched the follow-up mechanism for the repatriation of disarmed combatants, in Goma on 24 April. The mechanism comprises representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda, as well as the guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. Following the launch, my Special Envoy and

his Office helped to organize the first assessment mission by the follow-up mechanism, which visited camps in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, hosting disarmed FDLR combatants and their dependants, as well as in Rwanda and Uganda, hosting disarmed former M23 combatants. During the second meeting of the mechanism, held in Nairobi on 25 June, participants adopted a road map to expedite the repatriation of former combatants. This helped to accelerate sensitization and repatriation efforts in July and August.

61. Efforts by the mechanism resulted in the repatriation of an initial group of 13 former M23 members from Uganda to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and of 3 former FDLR combatants and 19 of their dependants from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Rwanda, while outreach continues to encourage others to follow suit. Furthermore, the activities of the follow-up mechanism contributed to the strengthening of cooperation among the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda with regard to the protracted issue of repatriation, which has long been a source of tension and suspicion among the three countries.

Support for dialogue and political processes in the region

Democratic Republic of the Congo

62. My Special Envoy visited Kinshasa from 3 to 7 June to engage, together with my Special Representative for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, senior government officials and opposition stakeholders, as well as representatives of the international community based in the capital. His consultations confirmed concerns shared by the opposition and some members of the international community regarding continuing restrictions on political freedoms and what the opposition denounced as lack of implementation of key confidence-building measures set out in the 31 December 2016 political agreement. My Special Envoy urged all stakeholders to help create an environment conducive to the holding of credible elections, in full compliance with the agreement. In his interactions with the Government and the President of the Independent National Electoral Commission, he highlighted the need to address the concerns of the opposition over voting modalities and advocated broad outreach by the Commission to build confidence in the electoral process.

63. My Special Envoy also held consultations with senior government officials in the region, as well as with senior representatives of the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the European Union. In addition to his meetings with President Sassou Nguesso, discussed in paragraph 57 above, my Special Envoy met with President Lourenço of Angola on 9 March and with the President of Uganda, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, on 30 April to seek their continued support for political and dialogue processes in the region. He had frequent contacts with senior officials of the African Union and met with the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security, Smail Chergui, on 22 June to examine the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other issues of common interest.

Burundi

64. In order to improve the coordination of United Nations support for the political process in Burundi, my Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region hosted an informal meeting with my Special Envoy for Burundi, Michel Kafando, and my Special Representative for Central Africa, François Fall. They agreed to continue to closely coordinate their efforts, in cooperation with the African Union, to support the inter-Burundian dialogue in order to preserve the gains of the Arusha Agreement.

Advancing women and peace and security

65. During the reporting period, my Special Envoy continued to promote the role of women in peace and political processes in the Great Lakes region.

66. At his initiative, following consultations with the Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Advisory Board of the Women's Platform for the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), missions were deployed to countries affected by conflicts in the region. The objective of the missions was to highlight the concerns of women and promote their participation in decision-making as well as in peace and political processes in the region.

67. In that regard, on 3 and 4 July 2018 my Special Envoy participated in a joint African Union-United Nations visit to South Sudan led by my Deputy, Amina J. Mohammed, and the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on Women, Peace and Security, Bineta Diop. Furthermore, from 9 to 19 August the Office of my Special Envoy facilitated "solidarity missions" to Burundi, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The delegations were led by women leaders representing the Women's Platform for the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise-Africa) and the Regional Women's Forum of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region: Catherine Samba-Panza, former President of the Central African Republic; Speciosa Wandira-Kazibwe, former Vice-President of Uganda; Liberata Mulamula, former Executive Secretary of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region; and Attiat Mustafa Abdelhalim Ahmed, Chair of the Regional Women's Forum.

68. In Burundi, the delegation met with President Nkurunziza, the First Lady, government officials, political parties, representatives of women's organizations of women, and other national and international stakeholders. Discussions were centred on the need for space for inclusive political dialogue and participation by women.

69. In the Central African Republic, the delegation met with the President, Faustin Archange Touadera, the Prime Minister, representatives of Parliament, the Constitutional Court, the Roman Catholic Church and the Islamic community, political parties, women's representatives and other national and international stakeholders. The mission welcomed the commitment by the President to promote greater participation by women in political and public life and in the African Union-led peace initiative in the country.

70. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the delegation met with the President of the National Assembly, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Interior and Security, the Minister of Gender, Family and Children's Affairs and the Minister of Justice, as well as representatives of the Independent National Electoral Commission, civil society and women's associations. The mission identified sociological, cultural, legal and financial barriers to women's participation in the ongoing political and electoral processes and called for legal reforms to address discriminatory measures against women and minorities.

71. The outcomes of the missions will be presented to the Heads of State and Government of the region at the ninth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism.

72. Furthermore, the Office of my Special Envoy facilitated the participation of the Regional Women's Forum of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region in the field visits to the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda

and Uganda, conducted by the follow-up mechanism for the repatriation of former combatants, to ensure that the needs of women and girls are addressed in the sensitization and voluntary repatriation process.

Displacement

73. Further to the outcome of the eighth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism, and in preparation for a high-level meeting on displacement, to be organized jointly with the executive secretariat of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, my Special Envoy undertook a series of consultations with regional and international partners, which confirmed the urgency of addressing the issue of displacement. Building on those consultations, on 28 May my Special Envoy met with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, to discuss collaboration between his Office and UNHCR to promote durable solutions for persons displaced by conflict in the Great Lakes region. My Special Envoy relayed the view, shared by representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, that the protracted presence of refugees in the region constituted a source of tension and mistrust between neighbours, and that stabilization efforts in other areas, including through the neutralization of negative forces, were unlikely to produce results unless the displacement situation was addressed.

74. Following the agreement, the Office of my Special Envoy continued to work with signatory countries, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, United Nations partners, the World Bank and civil society groups towards organizing the aforementioned high-level meeting on displacement.

Judicial cooperation

75. On 13 and 14 June, the Office of my Special Envoy, together with the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, organized the second meeting of the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network, in Dar es-Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania. Senior public prosecutors from the region committed to advancing regional, cross-border cooperation and began to discuss specific cases of war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes related to the illicit exploitation of and trade in natural resources.

Management of natural resources

76. My Special Envoy and his Office encouraged regional efforts to reduce the illicit exploitation of and trade in natural resources, particularly gold, which finance and incentivize the activities of illegal armed groups and criminal networks and contribute to mistrust and mutual accusations among the signatories to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. On 17 April, my Special Envoy addressed the opening of the twelfth Forum on Responsible Mineral Supply Chains of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, held in Paris. He called for joint actions by international partners and countries in the region to deprive negative forces of illicit revenues.

Economic cooperation

77. Following the first Private Sector Investment Conference for the Great Lakes Region, held in Kinshasa in February 2016, the Office of my Special Envoy continued planning for the second Conference, to be held in Rubavu, Rwanda, in 2019, in close collaboration with the Rwanda Development Board and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region.

78. The Office of my Special Envoy and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region also convened a meeting of the interim board of the Great Lakes Private

Sector Forum in Nairobi on 21 and 22 June, with the participation of the heads of the chambers of commerce and investment promotion agencies of the five target countries in the region, as well as representatives of Kenya and the East African Community. The meeting approved the road map for organizing the second Private Sector Investment Conference for the Great Lakes Region, which includes convening a general assembly of the Forum later in 2018.

B. Oversight mechanisms of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework

79. The Technical Support Committee of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework remained actively engaged in monitoring progress in the implementation of the decisions made at the eighth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism. Discussions at the 21st and 22nd meetings of the Committee, held in Nairobi on 26 and 27 June and 6 and 7 September, respectively, were centred on progress and challenges in the neutralization of negative forces, notably the strengthening of the Intervention Brigade of MONUSCO and the launch of the follow-up mechanism for the repatriation of disarmed combatants. The Committee also discussed developments in Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan. It encouraged the continued engagement of the guarantors of the Framework in efforts to strengthen trust and cooperation between countries in the region. The meeting also resulted in recommendations related to other regional commitments, notably addressing displacement, enhancing judicial cooperation and natural resource management and advancing women, peace and security in the region.

80. Representatives of the guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework met at the ministerial level in Brazzaville on 20 July. The meeting was chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Congo, Jean-Claude Gakosso, representing the Chair of both the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Regional Oversight Mechanism. It was attended by the Minister for External Relations of Angola, Manuel Augusto, representing the Chair of the SADC Organ for Politics, Defence and Security, and by senior representatives of the United Nations and the African Union.

81. The meeting participants encouraged enhanced cooperation between the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Intervention Brigade to maximize military pressure on negative forces; requested the Governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda to continue to cooperate in the context of the follow-up mechanism for the repatriation of disarmed combatants; and agreed that renewed effort was required to neutralize negative forces. They also underscored the need to strengthen dialogue and cooperation between the countries of the region, notably through regular exchanges at the leadership level.

C. Partnerships with regional organizations, Governments and other United Nations entities

82. My Special Envoy continued his efforts to strengthen partnerships with regional organizations, bilateral partners and United Nations offices in the region.

Regional organizations

83. During the reporting period, my Special Envoy engaged regularly with the African Union, including with the Commissioner for Peace and Security and the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, as well as with the Executive Secretary of

the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. Those efforts helped to align the views of the United Nations and the African Union on how best to tackle peace and security challenges in the region. Furthermore, they were instrumental in fostering greater coherence and synergy among regional and international partners in supporting the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

84. My Special Envoy also continued to strengthen the partnership between his Office and the executive secretariat of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. Close collaboration continued, notably with regard to judicial cooperation; women and peace and security; the repatriation of former combatants; economic integration; population displacement; and the Conference's Regional Initiative against the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources. The Political Director in the Office of my Special Envoy visited Bujumbura on 27 and 28 August to strengthen and coordinate joint actions between the two offices.

International partners

85. In addition to attending consultations organized by the International Contact Group and engaging regularly with other special envoys and special representatives for the Great Lakes region, on 7 May my Special Envoy convened a meeting in Nairobi that brought together representatives of Member States and organizations supporting the Trust Fund for the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, namely, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the European Union. They all reaffirmed their strong commitment to supporting the implementation of the Framework and the work of my Special Envoy.

86. Following previous discussions with representatives of the World Bank, which had included an agreement to enhance coordination and cooperation in the Great Lakes region, my Special Envoy met with the Country and Regional Director of the World Bank, Jean-Christophe Carret, in Kinshasa on 5 June. The two agreed to jointly convene a regional meeting to review cooperation between their offices.

Cooperation with other United Nations entities

87. My Special Envoy has regular contacts and held dedicated meetings with other senior United Nations officials in the region, notably my Special Envoy Michel Kafando and my Special Representative for Central Africa, François Fall, as indicated above.

88. On 1 July in Nairobi, my Special Envoy convened the fifth semi-annual political coordination meeting, bringing together the United Nations resident coordinators in the core countries of the Great Lakes region, namely, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, as well as representatives of MONUSCO, the Office of my Special Envoy Michel Kafando and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA). That initiative contributed to a shared assessment of progress and challenges in the region and led to an agreement to strengthen cooperation in support of harmonized political and programmatic engagements at the national and regional levels.

89. My Special Envoy, in collaboration with the Chair of the regional team of the United Nations Development Group, also continued to promote and guide United Nations efforts to operationalize the Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework. In addition to leading resource mobilization efforts, my Special Envoy convened a session, on the margins of the political coordination meeting, to review the status of implementation of the Regional Strategic Framework.

90. On 26 and 27 April, the Office of my Special Envoy attended a meeting that brought together United Nations presences in Central Africa, convened by UNOCA in Libreville. My Special Envoy also attended the 46th ministerial meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, held in Brazzaville on 1 June.

V. Observations and recommendations

91. I note with concern that the Great Lakes region continues to face significant political and security challenges, despite encouraging political developments of late, as highlighted in the present report. Greater political will and cooperation among the signatories to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework are necessary to advance the implementation of the Framework. Notwithstanding the progress achieved since the Framework came into effect in February 2013, the root causes of instability have not been fully addressed and continue to plague the region. That situation slows socioeconomic progress and development, in addition to causing great suffering for populations across the region. I urge the leaders of the region to seize the opportunity of the ninth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism to make concrete decisions to strengthen cooperation between their respective Governments.

92. I am worried about the ongoing activities by armed groups that continue to fuel insecurity in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On the basis of ongoing consultations between the United Nations and SADC, and in line with decisions made by the Regional Oversight Mechanism, the United Nations will pursue its efforts to enhance the effectiveness of the Intervention Brigade. I urge all countries signatories to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework to join forces to stop the activities of armed groups, pursuant to their commitments under the Framework and the Pact on Security, Stability and Development, and in conformity with the decision by the African Union to silence the guns by 2020.

93. I welcome the reactivation of the follow-up mechanism for the repatriation of disarmed combatants, which has created a positive dynamic of cooperation among the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda. I encourage those countries, with support from the United Nations, the African Union and the other guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, to continue in this spirit to finally resolve this long-standing issue.

94. I welcome the progress made in the preparations for elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I note, however, that sources of tension, including disagreements between political actors and violations of human rights, have continued to limit broad and genuine political participation. I urge all stakeholders to work together to create conditions conducive to peaceful, credible and inclusive elections, notably through the full implementation of the 31 December 2016 political agreement.

95. In Burundi, the United Nations will continue to support the East African Community in its effort to advance the inter-Burundian dialogue and to make it more inclusive.

96. I welcome the commitment by the Governments in the region to strengthening cooperation in judicial matters. I encourage them to make the Great Lakes Judicial Cooperation Network operational and to use it to fight impunity, promote justice and build trust among leaders and ordinary people in the region.

97. I remain deeply troubled by the humanitarian situation in the region. I encourage the Office of my Special Envoy and the executive secretariat of the International

Conference on the Great Lakes Region to pursue preparations for the planned high-level meeting on population displacement in coordination with relevant United Nations entities. I urge the countries concerned to come together to find durable solutions for displaced populations, and I encourage them to work with the United Nations and the Conference to that end.

98. I welcome the solidarity missions to Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan, conducted by senior officials of the United Nations, FemWise-Africa and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, as an important initiative to promote the inclusion of women in all aspects of political and economic life. I encourage the Office of my Special Envoy to continue collaborating with relevant countries and organizations to ensure full participation by women in political and public spheres across the region.

99. The importance of addressing the root causes of conflicts in the Great Lakes region cannot be overstated. I call upon the international community to support the Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework.

100. I wish to thank my Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region and his team. I appreciate the valuable work done in the Great Lakes region by regional organizations, particularly the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and SADC. I also thank the East African Community for steering the inter-Burundian dialogue. Lastly, I commend the Governments of the region for their bilateral and multilateral efforts, and the international community for its support for the pursuit of peace and stability in the Great Lakes region.